

strategy was Simmons' goal to unite men who could "ride." Ostensibly, these men would assist in Simmons' plan to bring Populists back to the Democratic voting ring through "practicable and honorable means."³⁰ To establish the first (and most organized) collaborative groups, Simmons enlisted the aid of Francis Winston of Bertie County to found White Government Union (WGU) clubs. The Democratic Party Headquarters in Raleigh planned the WGU movement for eastern counties with black voting majorities such as New Hanover, Craven, and Pitt. The WGU's popularity grew and eventually had over 800 chapters statewide.³¹



WGU Campaign
Button
Image: Cape Fear
Museum

The WGU placed emphasis on individuals and their ability to make a difference in local politics. Further, the unions were a tool of the Democratic Party

³⁰ Preface inside WGU Handbook: "Our State is the only community in the world, with a majority of white voters, where the officers selected to administer the Government are the choice of negroes and not of the whites. This condition has been brought about by an unfortunate division among the white people; and it is likely to continue until that division is removed, and unity again prevails among them as it did prior to 1892. The necessity for a closer union of the white people of the State is so apparent that it requires management and that necessity has called for the organization of THE WHITE GOVERNMENT UNION." *Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898*, (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1898), 2, Henry B. McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington, N.C.

³¹ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 4.

as union members were charged to work in multiple capacities: guarantee full participation by all white voters in the Democratic Party, report to local and state party chairmen concerning "doubtful and floating" voters who would be targeted for "efforts of the union to win the votes of such voters for the party," and to attend polls all day on election day. The WGU operated with a constitution and bylaws to define their goals and procedures. Produced and managed by the Democratic Party, the WGU was a well-oiled machine that featured four subcommittees: Committee on Registration, Committee on Campaign Literature, Committee on Speakers, and Committee on Challenges and Polls. The first three committees were to ensure all white men registered to vote, received campaign literature, and were treated to speeches. The fourth committee was to challenge illegal voter registration, deflect challenges against Democratic registrants, and attend polls on election day to ensure that all white men voted for the Democratic Party.³²

The WGU movement began in earnest in August and gained momentum as the election drew near. Other spin-off organizations that featured similar goals were formed in much the same manner as the WGU. One such organization was the Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington.³³ Another, more visible and violent, was the Red Shirt, or Rough Rider, organization.³⁴ The arrangement of men

³² White Government Union, *Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1898), 2-8. William B. McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington, N.C.

³³ Roster of Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington, n.d. Merchant Account Book, Private Collections, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

³⁴ There has been no definitive differentiation drawn between the Red Shirts and Rough Riders. The Rough Riders expression was drawn from the 1st United States Cavalry Regiment organized during the